

THE



DOCTRINE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER:

ITS IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY.

A SERMON BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN.

PHILADELPHIA:

THE LUTHERAN BOOKSTORE, 117 N. SIXTH STREET.

1872.

O LORD JESUS,

VERY GOD and Man in one Person, Thou hast indeed withdrawn Thy visible Presence from Thy beloved Church, because Thou wouldest not be seen, but believed on here on earth ; nevertheless Thou dost remain perpetually present with her. Thou hast not left us fatherless. Though invisibly, still really and truly, art Thou present among us. Thou Thyself, in the plenitude of Thy grace. And that we might be enabled to realize this indubitable certainty, Thou didst institute a feast, in the night in which Thou wast betrayed, in which Thou dost feed us with Thy Body, and refresh us with Thy Blood, until Thou shalt come again. Wherefore, assist us, O Lord, that we suffer not ourselves to be deprived of this consolation, but firmly lay hold of the same, till at last we behold Thee with these our eyes, hear Thee with these our ears and embrace Thee with these our hands, and thus enjoy Thy perfect communion in the rapture of everlasting bliss.

AMEN.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER:

ITS IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY.

THE HOLY COMMUNION is a *love-feast*, both as to its origin and design. The ineffable love of Christ to His own was the source of its institution. When the holy Evangelist, John in the Evangelical Record, comes to the account of the Last Supper which Jesus kept with His disciples, he begins his account with these words: "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." He wishes to declare by these words: Even the approach of His agonizing death did not cause Christ to forget His disciples, nor had His love toward them diminished in the least, but His heart was rather so disposed, that on the very verge of His departure from this world, He wished to establish and bequeath unto His own, the most sublime monument of His love. Christ also declared this Himself; for when He formally sat down at the table to keep the Last Supper, He uttered, as Luke relates, the memorable words, "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." As much as our faithful Saviour accordingly dreaded the bloody Baptism He was about to be baptized with, nevertheless He ardently longed for the night of His Passion, because in this very night He wished to abolish the ancient feast of the Covenant, and to institute the new.

But the Holy Supper is a *love-feast*, not only because it originated in Christ's ineffable love to His own, but also, as said before, on account of its design; viz., because its object is to furnish the well-spring and bond of union unto Christians for the most intimate brotherly love. For the holy Apostle Paul writes thus: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being

many are one bread, and ONE BODY: for we are all partakers of that one Bread." And further on, the same Apostle adds: "And have been all made to drink into ONE SPIRIT." He wishes to say: We Christians, by jointly eating the consecrated bread, which communicates the body of Christ, and by jointly drinking the consecrated cup, which communicates the blood of Christ—all become one Body and one Spirit, as it were one man, one individual person. "For inasmuch as the communicants do not parcel out Christ's body and blood among themselves, each receiving a portion of the body and blood of Christ, but one and the same entire body, and one and the same entire blood, they are thereby more intimately united and knit together than their own bodies and souls. Is not, accordingly, the Holy Supper really a love-feast? Undoubtedly. As utterly impossible as it is for a man not to love himself, even so impossible is it for a communicant, who heartily believes the mystery of the Holy Communion, not to love his fellow-communicants, of whom he knows, that the same body and the same blood of Christ is in them which is in himself. Hence we also read of the early Christians, that continuing in the 'breaking of bread,' they were really 'of one heart and of one soul.'"

But has not the Holy Supper, instead of being a *love-feast*, most intimately knitting Christians together, become the very subject of strife and contention, of division, schism and rupture, since the Reformation? Did not the Church, which came out from the Papacy, divide into two contending parties on account of this very Supper? And is it not the Evangelical Lutheran Church in particular which is to have no peace?

What! Is it not right that our Church should be determined to abide by her doctrine of the Eucharist, and rather sacrifice the peace of the Church, than give it up? Should she not rather give way in this point, in order to celebrate the feast of charity in brotherly concord with all who profess and call themselves Christians? Would it not be agreeable to charity for us Lutherans to suffer every one to believe and teach concerning the Eucharist what he judged to be right, and appear with him in peace at the Table of the Lord? Should we not lay down our weapons at the altar—at least observe a cessation of hostilities at the feast of reconciliation?

Or, is the pure doctrine of the Holy Eucharist really of such importance, that we cannot yield it?—that we must hold fast to it with unswerving fidelity, whatever the consequences may be? Aye, as we cherish the Word of God, as we cherish the majesty of Christ, and as we cherish our own salvation and that of mankind, we dare not, we cannot give way in this matter.

And this it is that we now propose to lay upon your hearts.

1 CORINTHIANS XI. 23-32.

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the *same* night in which he was betrayed, took bread:

24 And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

25 After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup.

29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30 For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

"I HAVE RECEIVED OF THE LORD THAT WHICH I ALSO DELIVERED UNTO YOU." With this express assurance the holy Apostle Paul begins his account of the institution of the Lord's Supper. This is highly remarkable. We see from it that the holy Apostle considered the true doctrine of the Lord's Supper of such paramount importance that he deemed it necessary specially to assure the Corinthians that he had not received it by report nor by tradition—in a word, not through men, but by immediate revelation from the mouth of the exalted Lord Himself. How important must be that historical fact, which the Son of God, seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, makes known to His witness on earth by immediate revelation, and which He describes according to all its circumstances in the most specific manner! How important must every word touching this fact be—every circumstance, however trifling it may seem! Permit us, then, to call your attention to THE IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY OF ADHERING WITH UNSWERVING FIDELITY TO THE PURE DOCTRINE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

This importance and necessity lies in the fact, that three things of unparalleled consequence are involved.

I. THE RELIABLENESS OF GOD'S CLEAR WORD.

II. THE REALITY OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE WITH HIS CHURCH.

III. THE MOST PRECIOUS AND INCONTROVERTIBLE PLEDGE OF THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS.

I.

The reliableness of God's clear Word, is the foundation upon which the certainty of our faith and salvation rests. If we can not firmly rely upon the clear Word of God, without being obliged to harbor the least fear that we may thereby fall into error, our faith is vain, and our whole Christianity like a house built upon the sand.

Accordingly, the device of Satan to cheat people out of their salvation, ever has been to darken God's clear Word, and to render its meaning doubtful. God spake plainly to our first parents: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat." Now what was it that Satan did in order to subvert our first parents? He sought to arouse doubts in their minds concerning the clear Word of God, and said: "Yea, hath God said Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden." And lo, as soon as man suffered this clear Word of God to be rendered uncertain, he fell, and his state of salvation was gone! Plainly God spake from heaven concerning Jesus: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Now what was it that Satan did, having subverted mankind, to subvert also the Redeemer of mankind? He likewise sought to render that clear Word of the Father uncertain; and, as soon as the voice of the Father had sounded from heaven, he spake to Christ, tempting Him, saying: "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." But far from suffering the clear Word of His Father to be rendered doubtful, Christ used the Divine Word to repel all the Tempter's attacks, and replied to every assault: "*It is written!*"

Now tell me, can there be a clearer and plainer Word of God than those words of the Lord's Supper, "TAKE, EAT, THIS IS MY BODY; TAKE DRINK, THIS IS MY BLOOD?" Is it not expressed in these words that Christ's body and blood are really present and received in, with, and under the bread and wine, in the Holy Supper? and so lucidly expressed that there is no possibility of expressing it more clearly? Or tell, what other language could Christ have used in order to express this mystery? Consider, if a person were to hand a cup, saying, "Take, drink, this is wine," could we understand these words to mean anything else than that there is wine in the cup, that it is offered to us with and in the cup, and that we are to drink the same? Would not the person offering the cup have mocked us, if it turned out that the cup contained no wine? But can we—dare we believe, that the dying Redeemer only wished to mock His disciples and His whole Church, when, handing bread and wine, and professedly establishing His Testament, He said,

"Take, eat, this is My body; take, drink, this is My blood?" God forbid!

But those who refuse to believe this mystery, appeal to the fact that it is also written, Christ is a Rock, a Lamb, the Door, the Vine, etc. And if we may, yea, are obliged, to take these Divine words metaphorically, why not also those where it is said, "This is My body, this is My blood?" This, however, is a mere subterfuge. That Christ is not an ordinary, but a spiritual Rock, not an ordinary but a spiritual Lamb, not an ordinary, but a spiritual door, not an ordinary, but a spiritual, *i. e.* "the true, Vine," God's Word itself declares. But where does Christ say, that by the "Body" and "Blood" He speaks of, He means only a spiritual, metaphorical body, and a spiritual, metaphorical blood, or only a figure of His body and blood? He rather says the very contrary, adding to the word "Body," the further words: "WHICH IS BROKEN FOR YOU," and to the word "Blood," the further words: "WHICH IS SHED FOR YOU." Now the spiritual, metaphorical body of Christ, or a figure of Christ's body, was not given for us, but His real and veritable body. Neither was the spiritual, metaphorical blood of Christ, or a figure of His blood, shed for us, but His real and veritable blood.

Hence it is manifest, that all those who maintain that the bread and wine of the Holy Supper are not really, but only *signify* Christ's body and blood, or that the body and blood present in the Holy Supper are not the TRUE body and not the TRUE blood, but only a metaphorical body and a metaphorical blood of Christ,—that both are absent, and hence only received in the Lord's Supper by the faithful spiritually, by the mouth of faith, which should be done even at every common meal,—all these willfully depart from the clear words of Christ.

I ask you, therefore, who still regard Christ's word as the Word of God, may we—can we answer Yea and Amen to such assertions? Never, never. If the words of the Lord's Supper were dark, equivocal and enigmatical, there would be no danger for one to expound them thus, and another otherwise, provided only that the exposition be not contrary to the faith. But inasmuch as these words are so plain, so clear, so simple, that they cannot be plainer, clearer and simpler, adapted even to the capacity of a child, therefore no man, no angel—in a word no creature whatever, has authority to expound them otherwise than as they read.

If we were to admit any other exposition, the reliability of the entire Word of God would be gone. For if we can no longer rely upon the clear words of the Lord's Supper—the testamentary words of the dying

Son of God and Saviour of the world, there is no longer any Word of God upon which we can rely. If these clear words of Christ no longer stand firm, no word of God stands firm. If we may depart from the clear Eucharistic words because they do not harmonize with our poor reason, we may depart from all words of God which appear to us foolish. If we may expound the clear words of Christ, "This is My body," so as to read "This only *signifies* My body," we may also expound the clear words of God, "Christ is the Son of God, Christ is the Saviour of the world," so as to read "Christ only *signifies* the Son of God, Christ only *signifies* the Saviour of the world."

And this is the very object of Satan in seeking to overthrow or becloud the clear Eucharistic words; namely, to overthrow not only *these* words, but to overthrow the *whole* Word of God, and render it dubious, uncertain and unreliable. By these means Satan seeks to prevent any Christian from being able to take courage, and fight against the world the flesh, and the devil, by the weapon "*It is written.*"

This also was the prime reason why Luther so firmly adhered to the pure doctrine of the Eucharist. He himself wrote, as early as 1524: "If any one should prove with solid reasons, that only mere bread and wine are present [in the Eucharist], there would be no necessity for handling me so indignantly. I am only too strongly of that way inclined, as the Adam makes himself felt. *But I am fettered, I cannot escape; the text is too powerful here, and will not suffer itself to be eradicated with words.*" Even Melancthon wrote: "I find no reason why we should depart from this opinion, that Christ is present in the Holy Supper with His body and blood. It may be, that an opinion which is more agreeable to human reason, is more pleasant to a vain mind, especially if it be adorned and set forth with acutely devised arguments. But how will it abide in *affliction*, when conscience shall question and demand what reason there was for departing from the common doctrine of the Church? *Then these words, 'This is My body,' will be very thunder-bolts.* What will a terrified mind then oppose? With what Scripture and with what Word of God will it defend itself, and persuade itself that Christ's words are to be accepted in a tropical manner?" So far Melancthon. Accordingly he also perceived, that abandoning the plain meaning, and interpreting the words of the Eucharist according to vain reason, is nothing else than surrendering all the words of God, and permitting none to remain firm.

As we cherish therefore the abiding consolation of the Word of God, with unswerving fidelity must we hold fast the pure doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

II.

But this duty is of such importance and necessity, secondly, because the question involves THE REALITY OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE WITH HIS CHURCH.

Even during His sojourn on earth, Christ gave the promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them;" and when He arose from the dead, and was about to ascend into heaven, He once more comforted His disciples with the valedictory assurance: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Hence we see, that Christ was not of a class with those founders of religions, who simply furnish their contemporaries with a religious system, die, and leave nothing behind but their doctrine, and, perhaps, their example. Neither was Christ of a class with those friends and benefactors of humanity, whose memory alone lives in the hearts of a grateful posterity after their decease. Nor was Christ a mere Prophet, who, like John the Baptist, was not the Light itself, but only bore witness of the Light; or who, like Elias, left nothing to his disciples at his ascension, but his cloak. No; Christ was God and man in one Person, and came into this world, not to introduce a new doctrine, but to establish a kingdom of grace and glory, in which He would be Himself the Ruler and King. This is the very characteristic which distinguishes the Church from all other religious societies, that she not only has the *doctrine of her Founder*, but *her Founder Himself* in the midst of her; that her Saviour, her Redeemer, her Helper, her Guardian and Defender, is not absent, but alway and everywhere really and truly present with her. This is the highest, sweetest, and most blissful consolation the Church enjoys. As long as she firmly clings to this consolation, that Christ is really and truly present with her, she cannot be dismayed.

Accordingly the rage and fury of Satan has never been directed against anything more than against this comfortable doctrine. Against this doctrine the arch-heretic Arius arose in the fourth century, who denied the Divinity of Christ; and against this doctrine all Rationalists of modern times, who wish to make Christ a mere man, are arrayed. They all would deprive the Church of the consolation, that she ever has a loving and present Saviour abiding in the midst of her. They all would persuade the Church that Christ is living only in her members' minds, by the mere perpetuation of His memory.

But what else are all those doing, who refuse to believe that Christ is really and truly present in the Eucharist with His body and blood? By such refusal, they also reject this most sublime consolation of the

Church. They often declare indeed that they are far from denying this truth, assuring us also, that they heartily believe Christ to be still present with His Church *according to His Divinity*; only they cannot believe that Christ is also present according to His *humanity*. But here they either seek to deceive others, or deceive themselves. What! Is there anywhere a Christ who is mere God, and not at the same time also man? Are there *two* Christs, a Divine and a human?—No; if Christ is only partially and not wholly present, even according to His humanity, then He is not present at all; for Christ is God *and* Man, one indivisible Person, which neither heaven nor earth, nor death, nor hell can separate. Even this is the consolation which the Church enjoys, not that the holy Son of God simply, who is a consuming fire unto sinners, but the God-man, Jesus Christ—the Son of God who hath become her *Brother*—the gracious, kind, and benign Saviour of sinners, is present with her;—that she has Him in her midst, who once lay in the manger for her, who once lived, suffered, hung on the Cross, and died for her, who was once raised from the dead for her justification, and finally ascended in triumph into heaven for the consummation of her everlasting glory. None other than this God-man, has promised to be in the midst of her, as often as she is assembled in His name. None other than this SAVIOUR, has promised to be with her alway, even unto the end of the world. Concerning Christ as the HEAD of the Church, all the holy apostles witness, that He not only ascended into heaven, but far above all heavens, that He might fill all things. Wherefore she believes that the Man Christ Jesus, is not enclosed in heaven, like any mere human saint, but that, sitting at the right hand of God, which is everywhere, He is also everywhere present as Man, hence also with her in the fullness of His power and grace.

But all this is denied by those, who refuse to accept the harmonious and sacred Sacramental words, “*This is My body, this is My blood*” in their native and literal sense. For even on this very account do they deny the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper, because they do not believe in general, that Christ in manhood is virtually present in His Church. They would turn the Church into a school, whose teacher is dead, and which now possesses nothing but his doctrine. Instead of the living and present Christ, they would give the Church but a dead and absent Christ, yea only memorials and figures of a dead Christ.

Learn from hence, that when our Church contends for the pure doctrine of the Lord's Supper, the question at issue is not a mere theological strife about words; nor a mere question concerning a false exposition

of a certain passage of Scripture; nor yet concerning Christ's presence in the Eucharist alone, but concerning the reality of Christ's presence in His Church in general. Woe unto us, therefore, if here we should give way! We would thus abandon the very Holy of Holies of the Christian Church, the ark of the Covenant and Mercy-seat of the New Testament. Wherefore, as much as we prefer a real presence of Christ to His mere commemoration, as much as we prefer Christ Himself to His mere image, by so much must we faithfully hold fast the pure doctrine of the Blessed Sacrament of the altar.

III.

But we still have another reason, which is this: Because there is involved **THE MOST PRECIOUS AND INCONTROVERTIBLE PLEDGE OF THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS.**

It is true, the Holy Supper conveys no other grace, than that which we have already received in Holy Baptism, in the preaching of the Gospel, and in the word of Absolution. When one is baptized with water into the death of Christ, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, God, in virtue of His promise, receives him into His covenant of grace, appropriates everything unto him which Christ has acquired by His passion and death, and invisibly washes his soul of all its guilt; and he that believes it, has it. When the Gospel is preached, the general pardon is proclaimed in the name of the Great God, which the Father has already solemnly announced by raising up our Redeemer from the dead, and the remission of sins is accordingly offered and delivered to all hearers; and he that believes it, has it. Finally, when a minister of Christ, or a Christian, pronounces Absolution to another Christian in the name of God, it is the same according to Christ's promise, as if God Himself pronounced it from heaven, and thus offered, applied, and sealed unto him the remission of all his sins; and he that believes it, has it. From these facts it might be inferred, that all manhood are sufficiently provided with the treasure of the forgiveness of sins, and that it is accordingly of little consequence, should the Holy Supper with its gifts be curtailed, or even wholly withdrawn from men.

But this is by no means the case. The Holy Communion is rather the crowning glory of all the means of grace, which Christ has bestowed upon His beloved Church. Consider: In the Holy Communion, Christ offers the consecrated bread unto His people with these words, **"TAKE, EAT, THIS IS MY BODY WHICH IS BROKEN FOR YOU;"** and the consecrated cup with the words, **"TAKE, DRINK, THIS IS MY BLOOD, WHICH IS SHED FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS."** The Saviour here evidently

wishes to say : Here, take My body and eat it, not as corporeal nourishment, but as the Sacrificial Body, given unto death for your sins; here take my blood and drink it, not as bodily refreshment, but as the Atoning blood, shed on the Cross, for the remission of your sins. If so, who can describe the glory, comfort, and celestial sweetness of this Eucharistic Feast? Here the forgiveness of sins is not only preached, proclaimed, announced, certified, applied and sealed unto us, as in the other means of grace, but Christ at the same time gives His people His own body and blood as the *pledge* and assurance thereof.

Now tell me, is not this the most powerful assurance of the forgiveness of sins that can possibly be made? Can a debtor still live in dread of his creditor, when his substitute has not only paid his debt, but even puts into his hands the sum itself, by which his debt has already been abundantly paid? Certainly not. Can a man therefore still doubt, that his sins are cancelled, and that he has part in the Atonement of Christ, when the great Ransom itself, which God has already accepted as the full payment of the debt of all mankind is placed in his hands, in his mouth, and in his heart? No; a more precious, incontrovertible, and Divine pledge than this, cannot exist.

But mark, even of this very pledge of our redemption, would those deprive Christendom who do not accept Christ's words, "*This is My body, this is My blood,*" in their native and literal sense, and make of the holy Supper of the Lord a mere empty memorial.

Say then, Is not the pure doctrine of the Lord's Supper worth being maintained with perpetual and unswerving fidelity? Is it not worth contending for, with fervency and holy zeal? Is it not worth the willingness on our part, to endure all ridicule and reproach, rather than give it up? Is it not worth the readiness on our part to relinquish the enjoyment of temporal peace and concord with men, rather than sacrifice this sublimest of treasures enjoyed by the Church?

Yea, verily. And inasmuch as God has singularly blessed our Church above all others, with the knowledge of the pure doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, He has also constituted her the guardian and steward of this celestial treasure in His universal Church; and, in His marvellous grace, has also called us, who are sons, and daughters, and ministers of this Church, to participate in the stewardship of this sublime Church treasure. Wherefore, although all other Christians should forsake this doctrine; though, through their great delusion, they should even ridicule and denounce it as an antiquated Popish superstition; let us cling to it with so much intenser devotion in these times of horrible infidelity and apostasy. Let us not be ashamed of this doctrine, but cheerfully

confess it, and publicly extol it, as the most precious jewel committed to our trust. For—never forget, I repeat it—the matter is not a trifle, but involves three things of unparalleled importance: The reliableness of God's clear Word, the Reality of Christ's Presence with His Church, and the most precious and incontrovertible pledge of the forgiveness of our sins.

But above all things, let us in faith diligently frequent this Table of grace, pluck the celestial fruit from this new Tree of life transplanted by Christ from Paradise, into the garden of the Church—and draw the waters of salvation from this Divine Fountain. Thus shall we be strengthened and preserved in true faith unto everlasting life. Then, with Christ in the mansions above, we shall keep the Everlasting Supper, and there drink anew with Him the fruit of the vine in His Father's kingdom. To this may we all come, through Jesus Christ, true God and true man, in one undivided Person, to whom be glory, both now and forever. Amen.